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Recent developments by the cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg suggest a new awareness by the two local authorities of the need to improve the quality of our city spaces. The same cannot always be said of the main players in the game of city building — the developer and his architect. Like gifts from a distant relative, their parcels come to us in expensive wrapping but generally don't fit the wardrobe. The real problem is how to co-ordinate these disparate private actions in a way that one can be sure of improving the quality of the public domain.

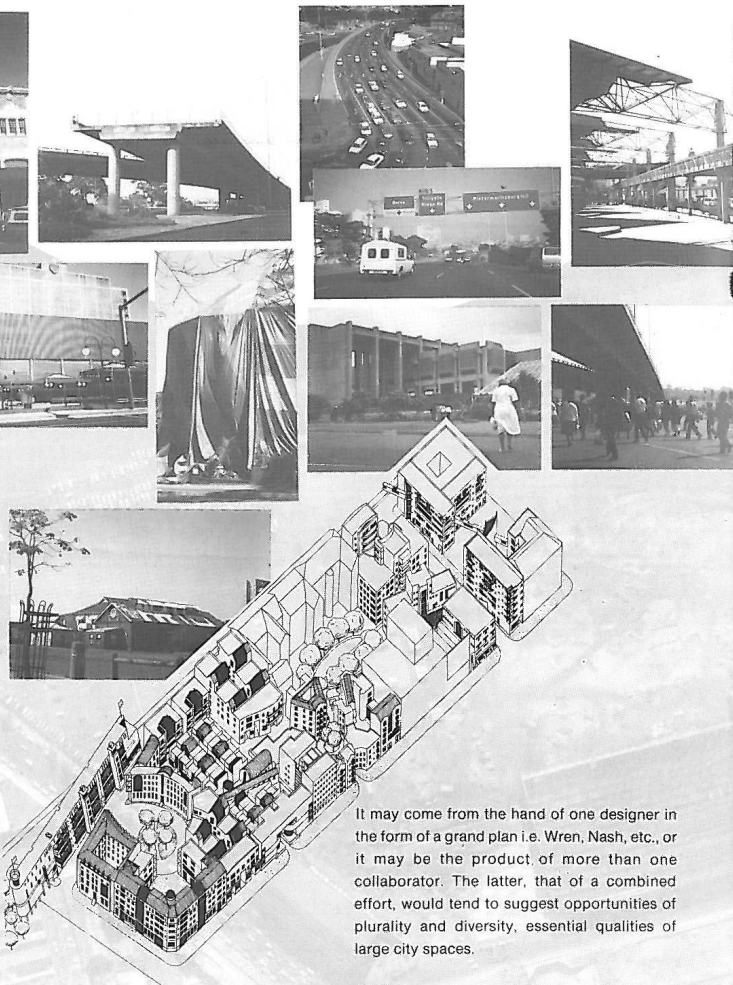
#### MASTERING THE MASTERPLAN

While Durban is shaping itself into a 21st century city, the continuing neglect of planners, architects and politicians to consider the city's coherent growth as an essential issue in terms of form (quality of space) and function (layering of activities) is disturbing to say the least.

The residential component in planning proposals for the urban wastelands near the Durban CBD are at present very limited, and consequently the pressure put on transport systems to mobilise the workforce is enormous and the urban environment has suffered. Durban is a place where everyone commutes, it is a car city, subservient to the demands of convenience and accessibility. Radiating freeways, 5-laned streets, parkades, bus and taxi ranks are the criteria for change and development. Roads come before buildings, which come before pedestrian space, when in the fact the total reverse is required.

It is necessary for the profession to assert its influences wherever possible to ensure that the polemic surrounding urban development concerns itself primarily with architecture.

To date the potential of such activity has been employed mainly in conservational matters. Durban's old railway station was saved but is now isolated from its train shed and is further from public access. The less prominent Radio House facade was lost and so was the opportunity to demonstrate that the preservation and healing process is very necessary if new developments are to have any relevance at all.



In order to avert further fragmentation and discontinuity a co-ordinated effort is required so that the honourable individual efforts of those making buildings will be an integral part of an overall coherent scheme of things.

How is this to happen? It may well be in the form of conceptual masterplans or frameworks which can identify important building lines and masses, public spaces, pedestrian routes etc. Building design proposals could then express an awareness of urban contribution that relate to existing and future infrastructures.

It may come from the hand of one designer in the form of a grand plan i.e. Wren, Nash, etc., or it may be the product of more than one collaborator. The latter, that of a combined effort, would tend to suggest opportunities of plurality and diversity, essential qualities of large city spaces.

Furthermore, by considering the scale divisions of a building, urban block, and ultimately the city, new proposals can take on the proportions of historical growth by identifying the appropriate component scale.

Alternatively the concept plan may be controlled by one designer. This has mostly led to systematic rationality and ordering systems that regulate spatial experiences and deny the intensity of juxtaposition.

In short then, the more pieces, the more interesting the puzzle becomes.

A precondition to this notion is the need for a common vision of the future — a vision that is the answer to the fundamental question of "what is desirable"; what shall we build in any given place; what would be the best from a human point of view.

This pre-supposes a knowledge of the society.

city as it exists and the characteristics of its emerging



#### INTERFERENCE ARCHITECTURE

Interference Architecture was a response by students at Kingston to the IBA housing projects in Berlin. The original IBA groundplan identified over 150 competition sites for new construction. These locations were mainly barren city blocks with isolated surviving pre-war buildings.

In most cases the IBA projects have been designed by one architect — repetitive and extruded perimeter blocks have resulted. Only in the cases where the competition winners (Krier/Kollhoff) have produced a conceptual masterplan and then invited guest designers to realise allocated subdivisions do the projects achieve a sense of street scale or Alexander's concept of a "Growing Whole".

An interesting event took place between two new schemes on adjacent sites, by Douglas Clelland and Mario Maedebach respectively.

These two architects had mutually agreed to a meeting, to divulge each other's proposals and progress. To Clelland's horror the adjacent scheme had incorporated double-storey windows into its street elevation, which was completely disproportionate to his own. After unsuccessful attempts to persuade his counterpart to alter his facade, Clelland was forced to compromise his own design and regroup his windows to imply the double storey.

The potential of a group design interacting across party walls became the main theme in the interference architecture project.

Nine students were invited to participate over six workshop sessions. The first meeting required the attendance of the student along with a building proposal, a blank sheet of paper over the existing site plan and a felt tip pen. Each student made a verbal application for site position and indicated this by means of a relative mark on the site overlay. Slowly a boundary plan evolved, party walls were defined and spatial relationships became apparent.

Once again there had been no preconceived masterplan determining the arrangements.

At each workshop the students would compare their proposals with neighbouring schemes and a series of interaction and compromise sequences took place until the sixth session was complete and the project drawn up. What was being defined was a process whereby an overall whole could be divided into diverse yet coherent components.

The open spaces around Durban's CBD are real opportunities to explore other such options which, if taken, could substantially contribute towards a coherent urban development.

There can be no universal laws which govern masterplans, each location has its own specific requirements. The following schemes describe two occasions where the interaction of creative minds operating in terms of a defined strategy have produced rich framework plans.

#### GROWING WHOLE

In Christopher Alexander's recent publication "A New Theory of Urban Design" an understanding of "growing wholes" is offered to students participating in a scheme for a large waterside development in San Francisco. There is no masterplan, no preconception, no contrived ordering, only a single over-riding observation that "every increment of construction must be made in such a way as to heal the city (heal — make whole) it must create a continuous structure of wholes around itself." The over-riding rule is then made clearer and simpler through seven intermediate rules. The theory was then tested.

Each student was required to make a total of six proposals (3 large, 3 small), each proposal had to consider what had preceded it and what existed, the whole also providing for future continuity.

The first incorporated proposal was for a gatehouse leading into the project area, this implied an axial road which was then consolidated by buildings along it. Behind these buildings a courtyard was established which in turn provided the setting for an hotel and coffee bar. Further into the site an urban square was established and this generated its own local hierarchies and so the project carried on until there had been over 90 individual proposals (incremental growths). The site being unable to accommodate any further installations was therefore complete.

